



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

MR. MATTHEW ARNOLD ON AMERICA.

IN the last number of the *Nineteenth Century* Mr. Matthew Arnold labors for the humanization of America. It seems to be his hobby. Our great dangers, as he sees them, are "self-glorification and self-deception"—"the predominance of the common and ignoble, born of the predominance of the average man." We should accept kindly the whole warning Mr. Arnold gives us, but probably our self-glorification is more annoying to others than dangerous to ourselves. Self-deception is a far more serious matter;—but are we guilty of it? Certainly we are told often and plainly of our faults, and even Mr. Arnold admits that we are a shrewd and progressive people and have fine political institutions. Perhaps he is deceiving himself concerning our self-deception, but we must listen patiently and strive to find out our faults and correct them. Our newspapers ought to help us in this, but they, Mr. Arnold says, are very bad. Upon this point, however, he speaks as an aggrieved party. Our newspapers were unkind to him, and he is only "getting even." When he went west from New York he was armed with a letter to Joe Medill, the old-time editor of the *Chicago Tribune*. Notwithstanding Mr. Arnold's safeguard, that paper, as he tells us, pictured him by saying "he has harsh features, supercilious manners, parts his hair down the middle, wears a single eye-glass and ill-fitting clothes." The same paper afterwards marred this graphic sketch by calling him a "cur." Mr. Arnold is not to blame for resenting such treatment from our press, though in seeking his revenge he is not proceeding in a way to promote the "sense of elevation" for which it is the purpose of his article to contend.

Mr. Arnold says that "the common and ignoble is human nature's enemy;" and "the predominance of the common and ignoble, born of the predominance of the average man," is the

malady in which he sees the greatest danger to us especially, and to humanity generally. This may be a danger in countries whose political institutions and social laws provide for the survival of the *unfittest*; but how can it be a serious danger where distinction and predominance flow only from merit? Are we deceiving ourselves in denying "the predominance of the common and ignoble" in our country? To find the most suitable term for expressing the special deficiency of America, Mr. Arnold turns to his master, Carlyle, who tried to dissuade a younger brother from emigrating by saying to him, "Could you banish yourself from all that is interesting to your mind—forget the history, the glorious institutions, the noble principles of old Scotland, that you may eat a better dinner perhaps?" Mr. Arnold says of this, "I am not saying that Carlyle's advice was good, or that young men should not emigrate. I do but take note, in the word *interesting*, of a requirement, a cry of aspiration, a cry not sounding in the imaginative Carlyle's breast only, but sure of response in his brother's breast also, and in human nature."

Carlyle's argument to his brother was that "*the history, the glorious institutions, the noble principles*" of their own country were so interesting that he ought not to banish himself from them for the sake of bettering his fortune. He presented the attractions which Scotland afforded to a native, as a sufficient season for staying at home. Mr. Arnold commits the absurdity of citing this in a criticism of America, because he, an Englishman, does not find America *interesting*. Of course *our* "history, glorious institutions, and noble principles" may fail to be interesting to Sir Leppel Griffin, Mr. Matthew Arnold, or any other foreigner; but we cannot admit that we are uninteresting, in fact, without first inquiring whom we should interest to escape the verdict of our self-constituted judge. Surely we have been interesting to British sovereigns from Victoria all the way back to George the Third, and to British statesmen from Gladstone to Pitt; and it is beyond dispute that we have proved interesting to the British army and navy wherever we have met them—especially the parts commanded by Burgoyne, Cornwallis, Packenham, Dacre and Barclay. Mr. Arnold cites one of our newspapers as saying: "Wales says Mary is a darling," the meaning being that the Prince of Wales "expressed great admiration for Miss Mary Anderson." This reminds us to claim that Miss Anderson, an

American, is *interesting* the British people in the histrionic art ; and it may be added that Buffalo Bill, with the unmatched skill of his cow-boys in riding bucking ponies, is interesting them (to coin a word) in the *horseonic* art. There is nothing elevating or interesting in hobby-horse-riding over America's faults, but bucking ponies *elevate* humanity, and are interesting—especially to the part of humanity that gets *elevated*.

Notwithstanding the fact that it is Mr. Arnold who charges us with being *uninteresting*, his own writings afford evidence that we have been somewhat *interesting* to him. But Mr. Arnold gives the word *interesting* a meaning to suit himself, and the *interesting*, as he understands it, is not to be found in the quarters just mentioned. His "requirement," his "cry of aspiration" is for the *interesting* of another kind. He takes from Carlyle the word *interesting*, as the very one for his purpose ("There is *our* word launched," he says with evident glee), but he proceeds at once to give the word a meaning of his own. For Carlyle, *the interesting*, was in the "history, the glorious institutions, the noble principles" of his country. For Mr. Arnold, "the great sources of the *interesting* are distinction and beauty,"—(not history, glorious institutions, noble principles)—and we fail, Mr. Arnold says, to come up to his standard. Our deficiency, according to Mr. Arnold himself, is due largely to our freedom from the rot of the feudal ages. "If we in England," he says, "were without the cathedrals, parish churches and castles of the Catholic and feudal age, and without the houses of the Elizabethan age, but had only the towns and buildings which the rise of our middle class has created in the modern age, we should be in much the same case as the Americans."

Then, it is old cathedrals, churches, and castles, "you know," that make the present generation of Englishmen *interesting*.

We may not boast with Mr. Arnold on guard, but we need not be discouraged by our lack of ruins and relics of folly and superstition.

Mr. Arnold says of our country: "There is little to nourish and delight the sense of beauty there. In the long settled States east of the Alleghanies, the landscape in general is not interesting, the climate harsh and in extremes." This is a shallow as well as an unjust criticism. He charges an whole country with possessing little to nourish and delight the sense of beauty, and in

support of the charge specifies that in one small part of it "the landscape *in general* is not interesting, the climate harsh and in extremes." We may fairly demur to what Mr. Arnold says of the landscape and climate east of the Alleghanies; and his stereotyped charge of boastfulness must not deter us from pointing out the shallowness of his criticism of a country extending from the home of storms and ice in the North, to the land of sun and flowers in the South, and from the Atlantic in the East to the Pacific in the West, possessing nearly every form and shade of beautiful landscape, and every variety of desirable climate that nature has vouchsafed to the earth.

Mr. Arnold turns from landscape and climate to men, and says: "As to distinction, and the interest human nature seeks from enjoying the effect made upon it by what is elevated, the case is much the same. There is very little to create such effect, very much to thwart it. Goethe says somewhere that 'the thrill of awe is the best thing humanity has;' but, if there be a discipline in which the Americans are wanting, it is the discipline of awe and respect."

There may be some truth in this. We stand in awe only of God and His works, and, therefore, we are not as *aw-fully* disciplined as people who are thrilled all their lives by the presence of "Majesties," "Lords," and other born aristocrats. But we are not wholly lacking in the discipline of respect for men.

Mr. Arnold says: "In truth, everything is against distinction in America, and against the sense of elevation to be gained by examining and respecting it." He is entirely wrong. In no country on earth is there a fairer field for distinction or a distinction more respected. *But it must be the distinction of merit.* We have no respect for a man of poor intelligence and bad character, because he may claim the distinction of being born a lord, or the like; nor do we admit that any "sense of elevation" would be gained by "admiring and respecting" such distinction.

Mr. Arnold, maintaining that we are without men of distinction, says: "Now, Lincoln is shrewd, sagacious, humorous, honest, courageous, firm; he is a man with qualities deserving the most sincere esteem and praise, but he has not distinction." Without chaffering about the meaning of the word distinction, it is certain—distinction or no distinction—that Lincoln's ability,

character, and deeds have given us all the "sense of elevation" that we can gain by admiration and respect for man. No higher "sense of elevation" could be created among us by trying to learn respect for the distinction of those born aristocrats, who are neither "shrewd, sagacious, humorous, courageous, nor firm"—men entirely destitute of "qualities deserving esteem and respect." In short, we are unable to do better in the cause of humanization, by "admiration and respect," than to admire and respect merit.

Mr. Arnold's essay upon General Grant, published a year or so ago, and his article in the last number of the *Nineteenth Century Magazine*, indicate that he labors under two difficulties: that instead of being clear, his stream of thought is muddy; and that he is not master of his mother tongue. If the two essays just mentioned are English literature (and they pass for it), then, at the risk of "self-glorification" and "self-deception," let us persevere in the development of American literature.

JAMES B. FRY.